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Organizational development in education views the school as a social system and is directed toward growth of the school's internal staff relationships so that the school can attain and sustain an optimum level of organizational performance. During a 1-week training session, involving administrative and teaching staff members at an experimental nongraded elementary school, participants were encouraged to view the school as a people-processing and growth-facilitating system. Open interaction among staff participants was stressed for improving the school's organizational performance, especially its internal problem-solving and decision-making capabilities and the creative collaboration of its staff for a product oriented, dynamic learning program. (JK)

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It is difficult to put this paper into proper context very quickly for you.[1] Perhaps the best way to begin is to put forth two statements which I think will help you to organize this paper. They are as follows: "most organizations have a structure that was designed to solve problems that no longer exist;" "I am less interested in inducing any particular change than I am in fostering and nourishing the conditions under which constructive change may occur."

In a way one could look at this work as in-service training but my experience has been that this is a very different kind of training than school people are accustomed to or acquainted with.[2] Therefore, the remainder of this paper deals with the assumptions and objectives of organizational development (OD), some background of a school which recently participated in a very brief taste of OD, some essential fetures of the communication package itself and some results. The paper ends, of course, with some implications.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Think of an organization as a unit or system which has parts and which exists in an environment. If the system is organic, that is if the parts are inter-related and inter-dependent, then the system is taking inputs from its environment and processing them in certain ways and producing outputs. The more its parts are inter-related and inter-dependent the better it is in its internal processing and in its external relatedness. In other words it is a better or an improved problem-solving climate. Like other kinds of entities, schools as organizations require maintenance and renewal. Unlike most kinds of organizations, however, schools have people both as input and as output, as process and product. All the personal attributes and characteristics brought to the school as well as the relationships that occur within the school make it a very rich and complex social milieu. Under these circumstances a fully organic inter-dependent state is no accident -- it must be worked at and perhaps never completely achieved.

How can we work towards this kind of organizational development? How can a school organization be helped to improve its self-renewing capacity? The solutions to these questions are not all in -- they are being created by behavioral science practitioners in the expanding field of organizational development.[3] The best prototypes seem to be in some industries which ironically find it more easy to actively consider the human side of their enterprise than do most schools which are more comfortable thinking about it or setting some remote goals or "philosophies" of education vaguely expressed as "learner-centred" or "self-directed" curricula (N.B. -- The Hall-Dennis Report).

When asked to briefly describe organizational development, I have found it useful to make an analogy to the human body as one kind of

system in relation to an environment. No one can guarantee anyone else a hazardless physical (or mental) existence. And knowledge of itself about the functioning of a particular human body or about humans in general is not much help. Applications of this knowledge in the way of specially designed, individually understandable and relevant, repetitive actions or behaviors are needed to help keep the human body in top organic condition. Some obvious examples are the regulation of diet and physical exercise. Although broad general rules can be followed in these examples, in the specific details subtle nuances and differences between particular bodies emerge.

Looking now at the school as a social system or organization, organizational development is directed toward developing the capabilities of an organization in such a manner that the organization can attain and sustain an optimum level of performance; it is a problem-solving process, and it is undertaken on a collaborative basis by a combination of the members of an organization and behavioral science practitioners. It reflects the belief that even in organizations which are operating satisfactorily, there is room for improvement. In keeping with my analogy to the human body as a system, I would classify my organizational development work under the general term -- Exercise. Effective organizational development work would be the systematic induction of appropriate exercise. And exercise, as I am using the term, means systematic repetitive activity designed to keep the school organization in a more adaptive state.

This "exercise" approach is quite different from the use of written rules, personal guidelines, advice-giving, or special organizational arrangements which are derived from personal experiences or extrapolated from research findings or theoretical treatisies which I sometimes label as a "cookbook" approach. I shudder when I use either term, however,

because "cookbook" seems to carry with it negative connotations which I don't intend and "exercise" is sometimes understood as only doing and never thinking. I don't mean that either. A person would be inviting difficulties if he did exercise without also taking some gross measures of his physical and emotional state, e.g. without thinking about it. Exercise, therefore, as used in OD does not refer to vicarious, or accidental activities unless such spontaneity seems to speak to some particular purpose or need of the organization. This would rule out, of course, calling such unplanned activities exercise if the justification for using them is like the following statements:

"School A does it! ..."

"Teacher B runs his class this way"

"At the university ..."

etc.

ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Considering the school as a people-processing and growth-facilitating system, one can make some assumptions which are fairly well supported in the behavioral science literature.[4]

- Work which is organized to meet people's needs as well as to achieve organizational requirements tends to produce the highest productivity and quality of production.

- Individuals whose basic needs are taken care of do not seek a soft and secure environment. They are interested in work, challenge, and responsibility. They expect recognition and satisfying interpersonal relationships.

- People have a drive toward growth and self-realization.

- Persons in groups which go through a managed process of increasing openness about both positive and negative feelings develop a strong identification with the goals of the group and its other members. The group becomes increasingly capable of dealing constructively with potentially disruptive issues.

- Personal growth is facilitated by a relationship which is honest, caring, and nonmanipulative.

- Positive change flows naturally from groups which feel a common identification and an ability to influence their environment.

From these assumptions, then, an organizational development program has the following general objectives.

1. To create an open, problem-solving climate throughout the organization.

2. To supplement the authority associated with role or status with the authority of knowledge and competence.

3. To locate decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities as close to the information sources as possible.

4. To build trust among individuals and groups throughout the organization.

5. To make competition more relevant to work goals and to maximize collaborative efforts.

6. To develop a reward system which recognizes both the achievement of the organization's mission (profits or service) and organization development (growth of people).

7. To increase the sense of "ownership" of organization objectives throughout the work force.

8. To help managers to manage according to relevant objectives rather than according to "past practices" or according to objectives which do not make sense for one's area of responsibility.

9. To increase self-control and self-direction for people within the organization.

The Thornlea Idea

"I know that good will and materials as resources will always be available to the teachers of Thornlea. If the school will be strong in the use of group processes, easy and free in communication, interested in professional growth and able to combine a high level of personal security with challenging insecurity in problems -- the success, the real success, will manifest itself in young Canadians who will be graduating from there. These will be our reward."5

This statement of the philosophy of the Thornlea Study Committee which worked hard to develop and nurture the Thornlea idea was paraphrased and echoed many times by various people in the school district to whom I talked. The school seemed to be a natural place for an organizational development project. By further background, the following key points capture the essence of the Thornlea idea.

- The school should be library-centred both physically and in function.

- There should be provision for discussion areas and individual work areas for longer work by individual students.

- There should be maximum professional involvement. Teachers worked on the Thornlea Study Committee which developed major directions and recommendations for the school. And two weeks prior to opening were spent by the entire staff in pre-service programs and other organizational matters. Before this, the program offerings were created by the Principal and the teachers who had been appointed.

- Administrators were well aware of the degree to which the "medium is the message" and attempted to build in to job descriptions some role flexibility so that no one person does only one thing: e.g. the Principal teaches a little, the second line administrators in the school -- called "Director" -- teach a little, and many teachers cover other responsibilities such as chairmanships, serving on policy committees, etc.[6]

- The educational program should be learner-centred, non-graded and based, therefore, on continuous progress. Learning was seen as dynamic.

These few points convinced me that the people who nurtured the Thornlea idea and the persons who by and large selected themselves to work in the school were thinking very different thoughts about how schools should operate and about how they should work in this school. The value commitment, the essentially uncharted directions, the highly visible situation, all these combined to mandate that these people must creatively collaborate in their work in this school if it is to be successful. Or put another way, they must be in touch with each other, must be committed to each other as they work on the myriad of problems which do and will confront them as they forge a new tradition.

The presenting problem for me was how to approach this school staff about the possibility of organizational development work: how to get across all the ideas behind such a project. Previous discussions with school people led me to believe that words were not enough -- some demonstration was needed. Thus, Mr. Arnold Falusi and myself developed a communication package -- roughly a week of activities specially tailored from all our resources to the needs of Thornlea -- to describe and demonstrate what a full scale organizational development project could be. At that time we were attempting the improbable in talking about and demonstrating to the Thornlea staff for a very brief period of time what OD is all about.

As things turned out, even though the communication package was a very brief intervention into the ongoing life of the school, it seems to have had some impressive "soft" results which should be communicated even though numbers can not be assigned to them. The question then is -- What did we do? And what happened?

THORNLEA COMMUNICATION PACKAGE: SOME FEATURES AND DIFFICULTIES

The set of activities which I have referred to earlier as a communication package was conducted at specially scheduled staff meetings about three weeks after the school opened. These meetings involved three hours on a Saturday, one and a half hours on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and three hours on Friday. Since the package was specially tailored to Thornlea, details are not presented. However, some essential features and resulting difficulties will be of interest.

Essential Features

Doing and Thinking was pervasive throughout all the activities. The staff members had to both engage in as well as discuss and think about what was happening to them during the exercise.

Attempts at constructive Feedback at three levels -- personal, interpersonal, and organizational -- were designed for and hopefully enhanced. Expressions of feelings about behaviors of individuals, groupings of individuals, and organizational problems were facilitated where possible.

Some time was devoted to skill building at the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels. That is, staff participants engaged in practice sessions around problems which were real to them and in methods of helping with these problems at the above three levels.

While directing these sessions, Arnold and I attempted to model appropriate and helpful behavior. Realizing that imitation is a strong form of learning, we remained as open and non-defensive as possible in our interaction with the staff. (For the remainder of the paper, Arnold and myself are referred to as "facilitators").

The problem of breaking in, that is becoming accepted as a truly interested helper and setting norms for behavior, was dealt with in the following way. The facilitators realized that in the opening sessions they would be the most influential "tone-setters." Accordingly, the opening session began with the facilitators speaking briefly about their background and the objectives of this package and then asking the participants to write some answers to the question "Who am I?" which would then be shared with other staff members in a "milling-around" exercise. We hoped to legitimize any openness which might occur as well as to respect a person's separateness in responding to this in any way he wishes -- including not responding at all.

Some Difficulties

Many difficulties were encountered around five major clusters. To begin with, there was much suspicion and mistrust of the facilitators and their motives for conducting the program. Some of these suspicions were built up before the package began and the facilitators had arrived through some very fortuitous, though important and impressionable circumstances. In a discussion with the principal some months before the activities with the staff, I insisted that the staff themselves should have an important say in whether a full-scale organizational development program and what kind would begin in the Thornlea school. This was the reason for the communication package -- our understanding was that the teachers would then decide whether to continue with organizational development without feeling that such a program had been imposed by the principal. In arranging with the staff the times for the communication package, the principal among other things mentioned to them that I was a sensitivity-trainer (which I am)[7] and that each person might want to send a brief

autobiography telling something about themselves so that the facilitators could know them a little before beginning the package. And the result was some very interesting distortions about the coming events as well as the mistrust and suspicion mentioned before. In fact, the package was posted on a calendar in the faculty room as a "sensitivity workshop" (which it wasn't).

These fears and misconceptions were somewhat allayed, though not completely I think, through various written handouts about the objectives of OD exactly as listed earlier in this paper, and by insisting on the understanding that during the communication package no person was under obligation to continue beyond the week's activities and that that decision would be made after the package was over. Personal suspicions were so high at one point that the facilitators improvised and played a recording of the Bob Dylan song "All I Wanna Do" to convey their relationship to the staff. Even so, members concentrated more on the teaching methods of the facilitators than upon what was happening to them and between each other.

Another difficulty was that of psychological absence. Staff members for some reason did not listen to each other, did not hear each other or the facilitators, and seemed by and large to ignore the readings which were few in number and very germane to the activities and to OD.

Punil control concerns also clouded the learning.[8] Members could not rest easy or assured at the fact that some 500 students were "loose" in the halls, and unsupervised. Of the difficulties actually occuring during the entire package, I am aware of only two. On the third day paper was strewn on a washroom floor and on the final day a fire alarm effectively closed the last session.

The physical absence of some members from some of the sessions prevented an optimum continuity of learning from occurring. While this was to be expected it made it difficult to up-date new members about what had happened and also made it impossible to backtrack on skill-building activities. Like all exercise, these sessions had to be appropriately paced and could not be "made-up" as in a missed lesson. Related to this is the difficulty of fluid membership. Not always were the same teachers present.

Thus the Thornlea communication package contained the essential features of (1) including doing and thinking in all the activities, (2) providing for knowledge of results, or feedback, about how the exercises were affecting each person, (3) allotting some time for skill building, (4) modeling appropriate behavior by the facilitators, and (5) designing some break-in activities to legitimize norms of openness. We encountered the difficulties of (1) suspicion and mistrust of the practitioners, (2) the psychological absence of some members, (3) pupil control concerns, (4) physical absence and (5) fluid membership.[9]

Results

On anevaluation sheet which was filled out by each member at the close of the last session a mixture of feelings and opinions ranging from confusion to excitement was apparent. Many of the difficulties alluded to above were identified on this form and some of the staff reacted to the timing of the total package. Yet another significant element was the personal style of the facilitators. Beyond these results, however, some other occurences have been thought of either by the facilitators or by other observers in the system as being caused by this communication package. These I have separated for convenience into results observed

during the package and results occuring after the package.

During the Package

For one member of the staff this communication package represented his introduction to the school. The communication package itself provided a most unusual and fortunate way for this person to be introduced fully to the staff. Thus, this unplanned beneficial and side payment resulted from the activities.

Quite early in the package many of the staff realised that in focusing on the behaviors and methods of the facilitators they were throwing up "smoke screens" around looking at and understanding their own behaviors and improving their organizational functioning. This was a slightly different perception from the excited ethos that existed in that school staff before this time. They were certain that they were getting along quite well before that period. By the end of the package, some of them were uncertain about this.

Later in the sessions staff members were willing to confront around value differences related to rating the principal of the school. Some felt strongly that they should rate the principal, others felt that they should not, even though everybody liked the principal.

In working through some paper and pencil responses about social norms operating in the school staff, it became apparent to many that they had a "public image" which was not their real feeling about what should be done in the school This provided much data for further inquiry on their part.

After the Package

More interesting, however, are some results attributed to the communication package from things that have happened since the package h

been completed. Three events have been independently identified by several observers in the school system. The first has to do with a staff meeting, at which the superintendent was in attendance, not long after the communication package was completed. At that meeting, much openness was apparent to a greater degree and many confrontations around interpersonal functioning occurred. This event was reported to me by several people in the staff who did not know that the others had told me that same thing. Apparently, staff meetings have never been the same since the communication package.

Another important result relates to the behavior of one of the staff members at a conference outside the school. This staff member was willing to confront the superintendent on an important value difference between them. The difference in behavior was noted by the superintendent and ostensibly cherished by him. The difference was also noticed by some other observers outside the school but in the school system, who attributed this to the communication package and the activities in which the staff member had participated.

More recently the staff has felt the pressure of external constraints. It is one thing to say that Thornlea will be a non-graded school but quite another to have the internal strength and capability to withstand or to meet the pressure to present evidence of student achievement, for example, which enables comparisons with other students in other schools. Value differences around this topic as well as many previously unconscious or hidden or unshared expectations and assumptions about the operation of the school are beginning to be explored. A recent staff meeting contained some confrontations between some of the members. This meeting seems to have bothered some, excited others, and interested all of them. Three of the staff independently attributed the open communication in this meeting to the communication package.

Implications

At the outset of this paper I said that most organizations have a structure that was designed to solve problems which no longer exist. In this specific organization a more appropriate statement is that new problems have arisen. The Thornlea idea is an exciting one indeed -- educators have never been short on utopian visions.

The problem with such ultimate goals is that we know little about comprehensive implementations towards these goals. It is one thing to <u>say</u> in effect that we will trust students or each other and quite another thing to <u>do</u> it, but with certain conditions or reservations. The Thornlea staff knows well that the curricular architecture is not the total answer, although it helps. We must also consider the social or interpersonal resilience or "muscle state" -- the social architecture -- of the school as an organization.

In describing the features of the school to close friends, and perhaps to you today as well, the quick impression is that it seems to be like every other school built around a new vision. Indeed, it has a house plan, phases of courses which are groupings of students into classes according to their level of readiness, and considerably more student option in choice of courses, etc. More important, however, is that there are people (both teachers and students) in this school who have previously only <u>talked</u> about a different kind of education and now have as much opportunity as possible to <u>do</u> a different education. Such action possibility intensifies value differences and increases the probability of confrontation about them. The question is, What will happen when confrontations occur?

The staff of Thornlea is a committed staff. My experience so far convinces me that clearer role prescriptions, job descriptions, or attribute preparation ala revised teacher selection and training programs are not enough. We must create on-going organizational arrangements and mechanisms whereby stronger relationships can be built and such individual strengths enhanced. How could a school be any different if people bring with them their previous backgrounds and unclarified expectations with no continuing program to support them in thinking in a different way about school and about teaching and learning as well as about each other. And even if different thoughts are occurring, how can we encourage the divergent attitudes and deviant perspectives needed to foster and nourish such tradition-breaking attempts?

We in education need to pay a little less attention to the <u>setting</u> of utopian goals and the designing of ways to evaluate whether we are attaining these goals and to <u>deal more creatively</u> with what is available and to build the strong relationships and organizational health necessary to creating a strong enough internal state or stamina for such a organization to flourish and grow.

Regarding methods of implementing I stated that the solutions are not all in. I have tried to describe a possible way and to demonstrate its importance to the Thornlea staff in the communication package and to you in this paper. One thing is certain, industries are more advanced on this score than are educational organizations.[9] Thus, when <u>people</u> are the products of these latter organizations, can we afford to ignore and not to experiment with and adapt successful prototypes from business enterprises where people are also a strong concern? We have a long way to go, and we better hurry!

FOOTNOTES

1. I want to acknowledge the help of Arnold Falusi and Ken Cluley -- two school people and organizational development enthusiasts who read earlier versions and contributed substantially to the positive features of this document.

2. This was certainly true of the staff of the Thornlea school to whom and about whom I am talking. My work with this committed collection of people has been most rewarding and I hope it will continue.

3. For some beginnings within an educational context -- see, for example, Goodwin Watson (ed.) Concepts for Social Change and in School Systems. Washington, D. C.: National Training Laboratories, NEA, for the Cooperative Project for Educational Development, 1967; and William C. Schutz, Joy. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

4. Noted in NTL Institute News and Reports, Vol. 2, No. 3, June, 1968 which is available from the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, Associated with the National Education Association, 1201 16th St. N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036.

5. Stephen Bacsalmasi "The Report of the Thornlea Study Committee" in Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Study Conference of the Ontario Educational Research Council, December 8,9, 1967, p. 209.

6. Further elaboration of the rationale for the organization of this school is available in an article by the superintendent of the district. See Mr. S. L. G. Chapman "Some Observations on the Opening of a New School," The Bulletin of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, March, 1968, pp. 73-76.

7. I am becoming less and less enthused about conducting T-groups with strangers or with "cousins," a term for people of like occupations or roles in different work settings. My intuitive hunches about the non-transferability of skills out of such "cocoon" settings, which are well-supported by the comprehensive review listed below, excite me about working with living systems such as I am discussing in this paper. But the techniques for approaching and working with these systems need to be developed and clarified. That is what this paper is about. For the review mentioned above, John P. Campbell and Marvin D. Dunnette, "Effectiveness of T-group Experiences in Managerial Training and Development" Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 20, No. 2, August, 1968, pp. 73-104.

8. Pupil Control is a concern in many schools. See, for example, D. J. Willower, T. L. Eidell and W. K. Hoy, The School and Pupil Ideology. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, The Penn State Studies Monograph No. 24, 1967.

9. These difficulties were expected by the facilitators, but this fact does not make them any less difficult. Similar difficulties in research designs have been noted in Chris Argyris, "Some Unintended Consequences of Rigorous Research," Psychological Bulletin, 1968, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 185-197.

10. In a recent series of lectures at the University of Toronto, and entitled "Organizational Illnesses: An Analysis and Possible Cures" (October 15-16, 1968), Chris Argyris noted that his experiences with all kinds of organizations lead him to place industry in the lead regarding concern with personnel problems, education is in second place, followed by church organizations.

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JCC:jl